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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: ISRAEL'S GAZA INCURSION, U.S. SENATE  
RATIFICATION OF FTA

SUMMARY: Oman's Arabic-language press slams Israel's Gaza incursion, and alleged American support for the operation. Government-owned "Oman" hails U.S. Senate ratification of the U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA). In online discussion, participants question why the issue of forced labor has affected FTA ratification. END SUMMARY.

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COVERAGE  
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11. Israel's Gaza incursion received front page coverage in both the English and Arabic-language press this week. Most Arabic articles were accompanied by photographs of bombed-out Palestinian government buildings, and scenes of distressed civilians. The U.S. Senate's ratification of the U.S.-Oman FTA received positive, front page coverage in Oman's English and Arabic-language newspapers.

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BLOCK QUOTES: ARROGANT POWER POLITICS  
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12. A June 29 editorial carried in government-owned daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) denounced "The Gaza Attack and the Arrogance of Power":

"[The Gaza operation] is another instance of the arrogant power politics that Israel has practiced for over 50 years, yet surprisingly some still envision Israel as a partner for peace. The international community is doing nothing, which is natural given that current international policy cares nothing about international legitimacy. Since America is heavily involved in Iraq, Afghanistan and the war against terrorism, its political position [on Gaza] is nothing new...the Palestinian resistance needs Arab support and a campaign to reveal Israel's crimes to the whole world."

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RULE OF THE JUNGLE  
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¶3. The privately owned Arabic daily "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) also commented on Israel's Gaza incursion on June 29, asking "Was it the Law of the Jungle or the Rule of Law?"

"Although we are used to various kinds of Israeli state terrorism, which all are classified as war crimes and crimes against humanity, the current storming of Palestinian territories is paired with a new phenomenon, the absolute silence by the international community towards the ongoing genocide which the United States continues to describe as "Israel's right to self defense." In this way America legitimizes and legalizes the acts of killing, destruction and terrorism, as it grants the murderers certificates of amnesty that protect them against accountability. Thus the U.S. prizes the rule of the jungle, and places power over justice, law, and international standards and norms."

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AMERICA'S "SELECTIVE DEFINITIONS"  
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¶4. "Oman" continued to condemn Israeli operations in Gaza with a June 30 article about the abduction of ministers and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council under the headline "International Legitimacy, Gone with the Wind":

"By abducting persons enjoying political and parliamentary immunity, Israel is distancing itself from all international conventions and protocols inherent in international legitimacy, which is now gone with the wind except under America's selective definitions. Why does America escalate unnecessarily over Iran's nuclear file, the situation in Darfur and Arab governments' human rights records while turning a blind eye to Israeli crimes committed in broad daylight? Even the UN will not release a statement calling for restraint, as if it were the Palestinian people who are attacking Israel."

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SENATE FTA RATIFICATION  
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¶5. On July 2, "Oman" carried an editorial entitled "The FTA between the Sultanate and the U.S.":

"In confident and steady steps, the Sultanate is advancing towards the goals planned by His Majesty, the most important being sustainable development, progress and prosperity.... In this regard, the FTA with the U.S., which was signed last January and is undergoing ratification in the U.S. Congress...is an important step towards enhancing and developing relations between the Sultanate and the U.S., and offers ample opportunity to achieve common interests. Omani-U.S. relations go back more than two centuries, and have been profoundly enhanced in different fields in past years. Ratifying the FTA between the Sultanate and the U.S. provides the opportunity for the Omani economy to introduce its products to large U.S. markets, in addition to providing the opportunity to attract big American investments in the rapidly developing Omani economy.... The approval of the Senate's Finance Committee, the House of Representatives' Finance Committee, and the Senate's recent ratification clearly indicate that the House of Representatives will approve the FTA.... A number of representatives have emphasized the importance of this agreement as an example to be followed when the U.S. negotiates

with other countries in the region.... After ratification by the House of Representatives, the Sultanate will be the second GCC country to sign an FTA with the United States.... The FTA will push trade forward, compelling Omani factories and commercial companies to exert more effort in order to adhere to international quality standards and retain their share of the U.S. market. This is in addition to the fact that the FTA gives the Omani economy opportunity to interact more with the global economy."

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OMAN ONLINE: QUESTIONS ABOUT FTA AND FORCED LABOR  
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16. Members of Oman's most popular Internet discussion forum "Al-Sablah" commented on the Senate's ratification of the U.S. - Oman FTA, and the involvement of President Bush: "President Bush stated that Oman is the best example of a good trading partner and strategic ally, through its efforts to lead social and economic reform in the region." Many Al-Sablah participants were concerned about the "forced labor" issue that has slowed down ratification of the FTA, questioning what that term means. Some opposed the FTA in principle, agreeing with the statement that "The Americans fight Muslims everywhere and do not give legitimacy to the present Palestinian government. Therefore, we should not deal with their government." The topic generated 875 hits and 24 responses.

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